

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1, 2, 14, 16-18, and 22 are amended. Claim 4 is canceled and claim 27 is added. All pending claims are presented below.

1. (Currently Amended) A method for countering spam that disguises characters within an electronic message, the method implemented on a computer, the method comprising:

locating portions of the electronic message where a difference in color between foreground color and background color is negligible, the locating performed by a processor of the computer, the locating comprising:

determining whether at least one of the foreground color and the background color is a gray-scale color; and

responsive to at least one of the foreground color and the background

color being a gray-scale color, determining a difference in saturation

between saturation of the foreground color and the background color,

determining a difference in brightness between the foreground color

and the background color, and deeming the difference in color

between the colors to be negligible based on ~~a comparison of~~

~~saturation and brightness values of~~ the difference in the saturation and

the difference in brightness between the colors regardless of hue

values of the colors;

deleting from the electronic message foreground characters from said portions, to

form a redacted electronic message; and

forwarding the redacted electronic message to a spam filter.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 ~~further comprising wherein~~ deeming the difference between the colors to be negligible comprises determining that the difference between the colors falls below ~~setting~~ a negligibility threshold, the negligibility threshold set such that, when the difference between foreground color and background color is below the negligibility threshold for a certain portion of the electronic message, said portion is invisible or nearly invisible to a typical human viewer of the electronic message.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein said locating step comprises, responsive to neither the foreground color nor the background color being a gray-scale color, comparing hue, saturation, and brightness of the foreground and background colors.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled)

6. (Canceled)

7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the difference between the foreground color and the background color is deemed to be negligible when the difference in saturation between foreground and background is less than 5%, and the difference in brightness between foreground and background is less than 4%.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the difference between the foreground color and the background color is deemed to be negligible when the difference in saturation between foreground and background is less than 3%, and the difference in brightness between foreground and background is less than 2%.

9. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein neither the foreground color nor the background color is a gray-scale color, and the locating step comprises comparing hue, saturation, and brightness of the foreground and background colors.

10. (Canceled)

11. (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the difference between the foreground color and the background color is deemed to be negligible when the difference in hue between foreground and background is less than 4 degrees, and the combined difference in saturation and brightness values of the foreground and background is less than 12%.

12. (Canceled)

13. (Canceled)

14. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the spam filter detects ~~spam is responsive to~~ based on characters within the redacted electronic message.

15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic message is a message from the group of messages consisting of: e-mail, instant messages, chat room messages, newsgroup messages, wireless messages, Morse code messages, SMS messages, MMS messages, EMS messages, text pager messages, and graphics pager messages.

16. (Currently Amended) A non-transitory computer-readable storage medium containing executable computer program instructions for countering spam that disguises characters within an electronic message, said computer program instructions performing the steps of:

locating portions of the electronic message where a difference in color between foreground color and background color is negligible, the locating comprising:

determining whether at least one of the foreground color and the background color is a gray-scale color; and

responsive to at least one of the foreground color and the background color being a gray-scale color, determining a difference in saturation between saturation of the foreground color and the background color, determining a difference in brightness between the foreground color and the background color, and deeming the difference in color between the colors to be negligible based on ~~a comparison of saturation and brightness values of~~ the difference in the saturation and the difference in brightness between the colors regardless of hue values of the colors;

deleting from the electronic message foreground characters from said portions, to form a redacted electronic message; and

forwarding the redacted electronic message to a spam filter.

17. (Currently Amended) The non-transitory computer-readable storage medium of claim 16 wherein the locating step comprises, responsive to neither the foreground color nor the background color being a gray-scale color, comparing hue, saturation, and brightness of the foreground and background colors.

18. (Currently Amended) Apparatus for countering spam in an electronic message, said apparatus comprising:

means for locating portions of the electronic message where a difference in color
between foreground color and background color is negligible, comprising:

means for determining whether at least one of the foreground color and the
background color is a gray-scale color; and

means for, responsive to at least one of the foreground color and the
background color being a gray-scale color, determining a difference in
saturation between saturation of the foreground color and the
background color, determining a difference in brightness between the
foreground color and the background color, and deeming the
difference in color between the colors to be negligible based on a
~~comparison of saturation and brightness values of~~ the difference in the
saturation and the difference in brightness between the colors
regardless of hue values of the colors;

coupled to the locating means, means for deleting from the electronic message
foreground characters from said portions; and

coupled to the deleting means, a spam filter.

19. (Original) The apparatus of claim 18 wherein the locating means comprises a
color comparison module.

20. (Canceled)

21. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein determining whether
at least one of the foreground color and the background color is a gray-scale color
comprises:

determining whether the saturation value of at least one of the foreground color and the background color is zero.

22. (Currently Amended) The non-transitory computer-readable storage medium of claim 16, wherein determining whether at least one of the foreground color and the background color is a gray-scale color comprises:

determining whether the saturation value of at least one of the foreground color and the background color is zero.

23. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, further comprising:

responsive to at least one of the foreground color and the background color being a gray-scale color, comparing the negligibility threshold to a color difference value, the color difference value based on the differences in saturation values and brightness values of the foreground and background colors.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein a negligibility threshold used when the electronic message is displayed on a liquid crystal display (LCD) monitor is different than a negligibility threshold used when the electronic message is displayed on a cathode ray tube (CRT) monitor.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein at least one of the foreground color and the background color is a gray-scale color, and wherein a negligibility threshold used when the electronic message is displayed on a liquid crystal display (LCD) monitor is less than a negligibility threshold used when the electronic message is displayed on a cathode ray tube (CRT) monitor.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein locating portions of the electronic message where the difference between foreground color and background color is negligible further comprises:

locating color tags in the electronic message, the color tags specifying foreground and background colors; and

dividing the electronic message into portions based on the color tags, wherein different portions have different foreground or background colors.

27. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein one of the foreground color and the background color comprises a gray-scale color and another one of the foreground color and the background color comprises a non-gray-scale color.